

# **EPA PREPARES FOR HURRICANE IRMA**

## **Regions 2 and 4 Taking Precautions, Activating Emergency Response Teams**

WASHINGTON – EPA's organized, emergency response program is preparing for Hurricane Irma, while continuing response efforts around the devastating flooding effects of Hurricane Harvey. Irma, expected to hit Southern Florida, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, is expected to be a fast-moving storm, with dangerous winds that could cause widespread power outages and damage to property across multiple states and territories of the U.S. While Harvey has been unique in its extreme flooding, Irma's high winds could result in downed powerlines, complicating the ability to pump water through drinking and waste water systems, especially in Puerto Rico.

"After seeing the expert preparedness and ongoing response efforts of our team in Region 6, I am confident that Region 4 and Region 2 can replicate their efforts, as we work together to provide the needed support to local, state and federal agencies around Hurricane Irma," said **EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt**.

EPA headquarters emergency operations center, EPA Region 2 and EPA Region 4 are monitoring the storm closely and making preparations to activate in order to support the U.S. Coast Guard, the Federal Emergency Management Agency and state environmental agencies, to quickly provide support to people affected by the storm.

EPA's Regional office in Atlanta is taking precautions, including: reviewing inventory of, and understanding all sites of interest, in particular Superfund sites in Southern Florida. Initial assessment has 17 sites (one Federal Facility) in Southern-most Florida (the southern-most 75 miles inland). An additional eight sites are located within the next 75 miles (150 miles from the southern tip). Region 4 is taking necessary actions to shore up these sites appropriately, work with parties responsible for their ongoing cleanups, and ensure that staff in the area are safe.

The Region is also reviewing information about drinking and waste water systems in the potentially affected areas, so that personnel in the field can be best prepared to quickly respond, post storm. EPA staff have been deployed to FEMA's Regional Response Coordination Center, as well as the State of Florida Emergency Operations Center. Region 4 also has additional staff standing by, ready to support state and federal partners if called upon.

With regard to the Mississippi phosphates Superfund site, located in Pascagoula, Mississippi, EPA is taking necessary actions to ensure the treatment plant remains operational during the storm. EPA assumed oversight of the site in February.

"Region 4 has been reaching out to all our regional and state agency contacts and I have extreme confidence in our emergency response managers," said **EPA Regional Administrator Trey Glenn**. "As always we stand with our states and FEMA, ready to identify at-risk locations prior to the hurricane, and will be ready to assess damage quickly after landfall." Region 4

serves: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and six Tribes.

EPA has identified and conducted initial assessments at 23 Superfund and oil sites in Puerto Rico and U.S. Virgin Islands. In advance of Irma, Region 2 has reached out to all the responsible entities, whether they be our contractors for fund-lead projects or PRPs, for NPL sites, active removal actions and oil response actions, with regard to preparing for the storm. Region 2 serves: New Jersey, New York, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands and eight tribal nations.

"Our biggest health and environmental concerns in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands are potential oil spills and the potential impacts of power disruptions on water supply systems," said **Acting Regional Administrator Catherine McCabe**. "Region 2 is working with managers of Superfund sites and other facilities that may contain oil or hazardous materials to ensure appropriate precautions have been taken to prevent spills. We are doing our best to prepare and support our citizens in Puerto Rico."

Region 2 is coordinating with other federal agencies, like FEMA and the U.S. Coast Guard, and local governments in the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico. EPA has staff set up at the regional response center in Edison, N.J. and the FEMA response center in Colts Neck, N.J. The Region is ready to deploy additional assets to the islands.

**As an Agency, EPA supports hurricane preparedness and response in a number of ways, including:**

- **Addressing Fuel Shortages:** The Clear Air Act allows EPA Administrator Pruitt, in consultation with Energy Secretary Perry, to waive certain fuel requirements to address shortages that occur as a result of the storm. If Administrator Pruitt determines that extreme and unusual fuel supply circumstances exist in a state or region as a result of a hurricane, a temporary waiver can help ensure an adequate supply of gasoline is available in the affected area, particularly for emergency vehicles. EPA has an experienced team standing by to expedite handling of any fuel waiver requests by the states or commonwealth.
- **Monitoring Public Water Systems:** Water systems can be severely impacted during hurricanes due to storm surge, flooding, or loss of power from extreme winds. EPA has a tracking system to identify systems in the storm's pathway. Following the storm, and if the state requests federal assistance, EPA conducts damage assessments of both drinking water and wastewater systems to identify impacts to critical assets and assist in the recovery.
- **Securing Superfund Sites:** EPA assesses conditions at the NPL Superfund sites in the storm's pathway and tasks each Superfund National Priorities List (NPL) remedial site manager to assess conditions and make on-site preparations for high winds and potentially heavy rainfall. Following the storm and receding floodwaters, EPA conducts rapid assessments to identify damage at sites and initiate cleanup plans if necessary.

Any on-site activities at sites located in the storm's path are ceased until the all clear is given and on-site equipment is secured. In addition, freeboard for lagoons or ponds is increased to accommodate forecasted rainfall if possible. After a hurricane makes landfall and any flooding recedes, the EPA remedial managers will conduct assessments of each Superfund NPL site to ensure no damage has occurred.

- **Assessing Conditions at Major Industrial Facilities:** EPA assesses conditions at the major industrial facilities in the storm's pathway to identify potential impacts and countermeasures. Following the storm and receding floodwaters, spills and releases are reported to the National Response Center. NRC notifies the U.S. Coast Guard or EPA based on preapproved jurisdiction boundaries. EPA conducts follow up inspections and damage assessments in response to reports within EPA jurisdiction.

EPA will continue to work with Regions 2, 4 and 6 to address these hurricanes and will continue to provide information to the public as quickly as possible.

As EPA prepares to support FEMA and its local and state partners, it continues to focus its message on the importance of public safety. For information and updates from EPA, please visit EPA's emergency response website, <https://response.epa.gov/site>.

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